

# President's Report 2014-2015

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President – Royal Zoological Society of NSW

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Preparing the annual report for the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales (RZS NSW) is a good time for reflection: what has the Society done and what have we achieved? While it is always good to be able to report on a new and successful initiative, sometimes simply repeating the same things year after year can be a measure of success. The 2014/2015 membership year was largely one of consolidation – implementing initiatives that are well tested or ones that we are already developing.

## Membership

At the end of the 2014/2015 year our membership sat at 1127. This was up 10% on the previous year. Increase in membership was relatively consistent across the membership types but is largest in our student members.

## Council

The RZS NSW Council stayed relatively constant through the year. Two council members retired during the year: I would like to thank Mike Calver and Jennifer Clarke for their work on Council. Two new Council members have been nominated to replace them – Stephen Ambrose and Hayley Bates.

Thanks must go to every member of council and our executive officer Stewart Monti. It is through the work of this group that the RZS NSW achieves what it does.

The council members in 2015 were: Stephen Ambrose, Peter Banks, Hayley Bates, Chris Dickman, Peggy Eby, Adele Haythornthwaite, JC Herremans, Cathy Herbert, Pat Hutchings, Brad Law, Dan Lunney, Paul Maguire, Martin Predavec, Pauline Ross, Ricky Spencer, Noel Tait and Arthur White.

## Survey of members

In 2015, we ran a survey of members in order to gauge their feelings about the Society. The results are being used to guide the RZS NSW Council in our decisions going forward. Overall, the response from members was positive. For example, members generally thought we were meeting the objectives of the Society (Figure 3) and were happy with their membership (Figure 4). A number of points were raised by members in the survey and these are addressed in part in the following sections.

## Publications

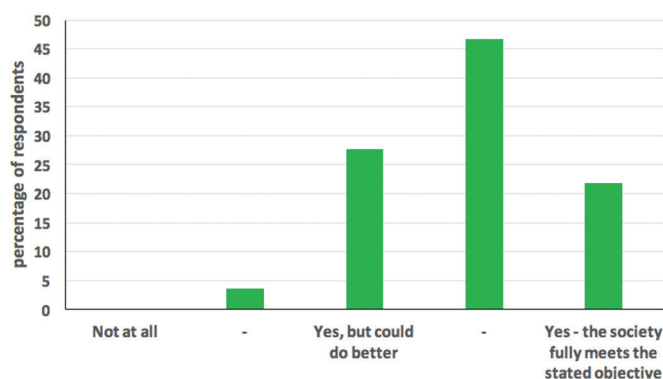
The Society publishes papers from two sources – our general submissions to *Australian Zoologist* and the



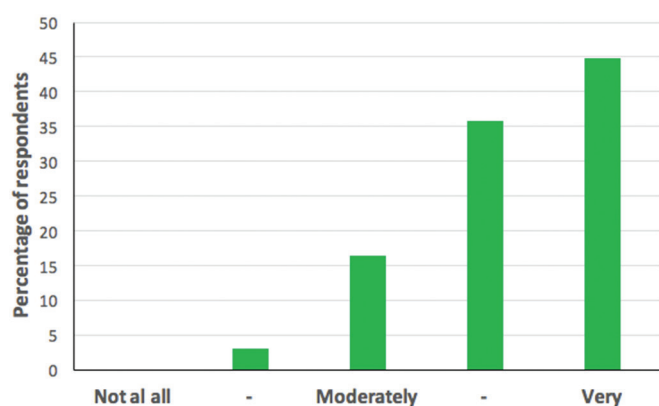
**Figure 1:** Martin Predavec, president of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, delivering the president's report at the AGM, 7 November 2015. Photograph: Dan Lunney



**Figure 2:** RZS NSW Council members and fellows of the Society, from left, Noel Tait FRZS, Adele Haythornthwaite FRZS and Pat Hutchings FRZS at the AGM, 7 November 2015. Also pictured are RZS NSW fellows Rick Shine FRZS and Mike Archer FRZS. Photograph: Dan Lunney



**Figure 3:** The main objectives of the RZS NSW are to: (i) promote and advance the science of zoology, (ii) protect, preserve and conserve the native animals of Australia and their associated habitats. Do you think that the Society is meeting these objectives?



**Figure 4:** How satisfied overall are you with your membership of RZS NSW?

proceedings of each year's scientific forum. In 2014 the decision was made to publish the proceedings as special editions of *Australian Zoologist*. This year's forum, *Zoology on the table: the science, sustainability and politics of eating animals*, which concluded just five minutes before this AGM, was another fascinating aspect of zoology and, in particular, the social context of a lively area of zoology. The council of the RZS runs these forums each year just before the AGM, and this year's forum was organized in detail with Thom van Dooren of the University of NSW, with RZS councillors Dan Lunney and Martin Predavec.

The member survey raised two issues relating to our publications: access to publications and time from submission to publication. In April 2015 our online publication presence moved from Metapress, where we had been for the previous two years, to Allen Press. We learnt a lot from our dealings with Metapress and as a result what we now offer with Allen Press is a lot more accessible (see [publications.rzsns.org.au](http://publications.rzsns.org.au)). All our *Australian Zoologist* content, starting from the journal's first edition in 1914, is now available electronically and, apart from the last two years, is open access. In 2015 we also started discussions with Allen Press about an online manuscript submission and peer review system – we expect this system to be up and running in 2016.

## Junior member engagement

One of the new initiatives this year was the MicroZoo, which was an initiative of one of our council members Noel Tait. We brought junior members of the society into the zoo and showed them invertebrates under microscopes. Noel insisted that all the specimens we showed were living and injected his own enthusiasm to the day (Figure 5). The feedback we received from parents and guardians was tremendous.

*"We'd love to see more sessions – Our son has already written three topics from the one session (one about using a microscope like a real scientist! One on his new knowledge of invertebrates. And one on his general experience of being in a secret part of the zoo) so I'm pleased as well as that's three weeks of "News" at school completed that I don't have to drag an idea out of him for!"*

*"Just to say many thanks to you and your learned colleagues for the animated session on Saturday. Our four kids absolutely enjoyed it and came back saying "it was really good". The microscopes and the spiders were apparently a real hit."*



**Figure 5:** RZS NSW Council member Noel Tait explaining how to capture invertebrates. Photograph: Martin Predavec

## Research grants

The Society and our partners continued to support the research of students and early career researchers.

The Society offers Ethel Mary Read annually, and in 2015 there were four recipients:

- **Emily Bayraktarov** (University of Queensland – postdoctoral fellow). Coral-algal dynamics under future carbon dioxide scenarios and eutrophication.
- **Rowena Hamer** (University of Tasmania, PhD student). Restoring resilience in wildlife populations: devils, quolls and feral cats in the Tasmanian midlands.
- **Celine Goulet** (Monash University, PhD student).



Beyond the personality syndrome: correlation of physiology behaviour and recognition in an invasive lizard.

- **Phoebe Burns** (Melbourne University, PhD student). Testing the decline, predicting the rarity and modelling for the future of the New Holland Mouse.

The Society also administered and provided scientific support to the Paddy Pallin Research Grants, funded and supported by the Paddy Pallin Foundation and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife. In 2014, four grants were awarded:

- **Kylie Brice** (University of Western Sydney). The Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) Faecal Bacterial Microbiome; Does Change in Diet Impact Community Structure?
- **Samantha Tol** (James Cook University). The role of seagrass dispersal by marine mega-herbivores, dugong (*Dugong dugong*) and green seagrass re-establishment strategies in tropical Queensland.
- **Kyla Johnstone** (University of Sydney). How personality traits influence interactions with wildlife trapping devices.
- **Robyn Shaw** (Australian National University). Halting Australia's mammal declines: a demographic, ecological and genetic approach to fire response in Australian native rodents.

## Whitley Awards

The Whitley Awards recognise outstanding achievement in publications that promote zoology and the conservation of Australia's unique fauna. The 2015 Whitley Medal went to Gordon Grigg and David Kirshcner for their book *The Biology and Evolution of Crocodilians*. The special commendation went to Don Bradshaw. Details of the awards can be seen at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2016.009>

## Fellows of the Society

One of the functions of the Council of the RZS NSW is to appoint as a Fellow of the Society (or FRZS) any Scientific Member who has rendered distinguished service to the Society or to Australian zoology. Fellows have been appointed since the earliest days of the RZS (the first in 1887). In the 135-year history of the RZS (to 2015) there have been 85 RZS NSW Fellows elected.

In 2015 the Council agreed unanimously to the election of Rick Shine (Figure 6) as a Fellow of the Society. The citation was given by Gordon Grigg FRZS (Figure 7). A transcript of Gordon's speech is shown on the next page.



Figure 6: RZS NSW Fellow, Rick Shine, with his fellowship certificate. Photograph: Dan Lunney



Figure 7: RZS NSW Fellow, Rick Shine (left), receiving his fellowship certificate from Gordon Grigg, RZS NSW Fellow Paul Adam looks on. Photograph: Dan Lunney

## **Rick Shine – Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW**

I am very pleased to speak at this honouring of Rick Shine with Fellowship of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW and to present his Certificate. I have known Rick for 45 years, meeting him in 1971 on a trip to Stevens Island in Cook Strait, with Bill Dawbin from the University of Sydney, studying tuataras. Rick was there with his Honours supervisor, Dick Barwick, from ANU. Subsequently he took up a post-doctoral position at Sydney in 1978, when I was still on the staff there, then joined the academic staff and became a Professor in 2003. So I am well acquainted with his career, and his many achievements. We have even worked together on a couple of publications.

The Royal Zoological Society of NSW awards Fellowships to Scientific Members who have “rendered distinguished service to the Society or to Australian Zoology”. Sometimes Fellowships are won by people whose distinguished service is almost entirely to the Society; sometimes, usually in fact, it is a scientist’s distinguished service to Australian Zoology that draws the RZS Council’s attention to a potential awardee. In Rick’s case, he qualifies on both counts.

His service to the Society includes a period on Council and academic support provided through being a willing referee of papers submitted to the *Australian Zoologist* and publications from RZS NSW Forums.

His service to Australian Zoology exceeds what can reasonably be reviewed here in any detail. In short form, I can report that he is author/co-author of more than 800 professional publications, has supervised about 40 Honours students and more than 60 Higher Degree students. I often say that it is an oversimplification to say that zoologists work on animals, they really work on ideas about animals. In Rick’s case, the ideas he studies are primarily about evolution and ecology, and the critters to which he poses questions in these fields are snakes and other reptiles and, more recently, cane toads. His research has drawn international attention and he has numerous awards, including fellowship of the Australian Academy of Science and appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia. He is currently a Laureate Fellow of the Australian Research Council.

With Fellowship of the RZS NSW Rick joins a club with a very long history; the first fellowship was awarded in 1887, nine years after the Society was formed. Rick is the 86<sup>th</sup> Fellow. Looking down the list one finds many names that will be instantly familiar, all stalwarts of Australian zoology. Without including any people still extant, a few are worth mentioning: William Dakin, Neville Cayley, Harry Burrell, Gilbert Whitley, Alec Chisholm, Ellis Le Geyt Troughton, Joyce Allan, Edward Hallstrom, James Kinghorn and Elizabeth Pope.

One name will stand out particularly for Rick, James Kinghorn. I recall him telling me that in his youth he poured over Kinghorn’s little book of Australian Snakes.

On behalf of the Society it is a pleasure to congratulate Rick on his Fellowship.

Gordon Grigg, FRZS  
7 November 2015